

For immediate release
February 9, 2004

USIBWC EXTENDS PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD ON RIO GRANDE ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has extended until March 1, 2004 the public comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on River Management Alternatives for the Rio Grande Canalization Project. The DEIS was released for public comment in December.

The USIBWC, in cooperation with the United States Bureau of Reclamation, prepared the DEIS to analyze the effects of four alternatives for future operation and maintenance of the Rio Grande Canalization Project and implementation of environmental enhancements. The project covers 105 river miles from Percha Dam, New Mexico south to El Paso, Texas. The USIBWC operates and maintains the project to facilitate Rio Grande water deliveries to users in Southern New Mexico, West Texas, and Mexico. The project also includes a levee system for flood control.

The original deadline for public comment was February 10. In response to requests from a number of stakeholders, USIBWC Commissioner Arturo Q. Duran extended the comment period through March 1. Written comments should be directed to:

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The alternatives analyzed in the DEIS can be summarized as follows:

- 1. No-Action Alternative:** Continues current operation and maintenance activities.
- 2. Flood Control Improvement Alternative:** Considers an increase in flood containment capacity by raising levees along 60 miles, constructing 6 miles of new levees, and building a 2.8 mile floodwall in the Canutillo, Texas area. Additionally, changes would be made in the livestock grazing lease management program to reduce erosion.
- 3. Integrated USIBWC Land Management:** In addition to the flood control improvement and erosion protection works of Alternative 2, this alternative incorporates environmental measures within the floodway in lands under USIBWC jurisdiction. Planting of native riparian species in the floodway would be coupled with stream bank reconfiguration to allow overbank flows within the floodway.

4. Targeted River Restoration: This alternative also builds on the improvements of Alternative 2, with emphasis on environmental measures associated with partial restoration such as pulse water flows to promote riparian corridor development, opening of meanders, and modification of arroyos to increase aquatic habitat diversification. Environmental measures would extend beyond the USIBWC right of way through the use of voluntary conservation easements.

The DEIS is available on the USIBWC web site, www.ibwc.state.gov at *IBWC News*. Additionally, copies are available for inspection and review at the following locations: USIBWC Headquarters, 4171 North Mesa Street, Building C, El Paso, TX; Branigan Memorial Library, 200 East Picacho Avenue, Las Cruces, NM; El Paso Public Library, 501 North Oregon Street, El Paso, TX; New Mexico State University Library, Las Cruces, NM; and University Library, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, TX.

After considering comments received on the DEIS, the Commission will prepare a Final Environmental Impact Statement, followed by a Record of Decision selecting an alternative for implementation.

For more information:

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